



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

News Release

Pacific Islands External Affairs Office

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Public Comments Sought on Proposed Critical Habitat for Eleven Species of Hawaiian Picture-wing Flies

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released for public comment today a proposed rule that would designate critical habitat for 11 species of Hawaiian picture-wing flies. Each of the picture-wing species is found only on a single island, and each breeds only on a single species of plant or a few related species of plants, some of which are also listed as threatened or endangered species.

The Service proposes that approximately 18 acres be designated as critical habitat for 11 species of Hawaiian picture-wings, although 4 of those acres are further proposed for exclusion because of ongoing management activities that benefit the species. Critical habitat has not been proposed for a twelfth listed species found only on Maui since its habitat is already protected in the Puu Kukui Watershed Management Area. Six of the 11 picture-wings are found on Oahu, three on the island of Hawaii, and one each on Kauai and Molokai.

On Oahu, 5 acres of critical habitat are proposed within 9 units, but four of those units overlap other units. Six units are on private land owned by the Estate of James Campbell, 2 units are on state land, and 1 unit is on City and County of Honolulu land.

On the Big Island, 11 1-acre units are proposed as critical habitat, including 7 acres on state land and 4 acres on private land. Three acres owned by Kamehameha Schools are proposed for exclusion because of ongoing habitat management efforts by the landowner. A 1-acre critical habitat unit is proposed on state land on Kauai, and the final 1-acre unit on Molokai - located on private land - is proposed for exclusion from critical habitat designation because of management activities by The Nature Conservancy that benefit the species.

Critical habitat for the 11 listed species of Hawaiian picture-wings was determined by using the best scientific and commercial data available. Information included occurrence data for all 11 species, peer and non peer-reviewed scientific publications, Service listing and recovery documents, unpublished reports from The Nature Conservancy of Hawaii, and aerial photographs and satellite imagery of the Hawaiian Islands.

Under a settlement agreement approved by the United States District Court for the District of Hawaii, the Service is to finalize critical habitat for these species by April 17, 2007.

There are approximately 106 species of Hawaiian picture-wings. Each species is specially adapted to a particular island and a specific habitat type, ranging from desert-like habitats to rain forests and swamplands.

Hawaiian picture-wings have been called the “birds of paradise” of the insect world due to their spectacular displays during courtship and defense of their territories. The picture-wings are known for their elaborate markings on otherwise clear wings. Future conservation efforts will focus on monitoring existing populations and controlling threats to enhance populations of listed species.

The major threats to the 11 listed species of picture-wing flies are habitat degradation by feral animals such as pigs, loss of host plants, and impacts of nonnative insect predators and parasites, including ants and wasps. Furthermore, all of these picture-wing flies have been reduced to just a few populations within localized patches of their host plants.

Those species for which critical habitat is proposed are: *Drosophila aglaia*, *Drosophila hemipeza*, *Drosophila montgomeryi*, *Drosophila obatai*, *Drosophila substenoptera*, and *Drosophila tarphytrichia* (all found on Oahu); *Drosophila heteroneura*, *Drosophila ochrobasis* and *Drosophila mulli* (found on the island of Hawaii); *Drosophila musaphilia* (found on Kauai); and *Drosophila differens* (found on Molokai).

The Service appreciates all comments on the proposed rule but is particularly seeking information concerning:

- why habitat should or should not be designated and whether or not the benefit of designation outweighs the benefits of not designating critical habitat for the species;
- specific information on the amount and distribution of the 11 species of Hawaiian picture-wing habitats, and what habitat is essential to the survival of the species and why;
- land use designations and current or planned activities in the subject areas and their possible impacts on proposed critical habitat;
- any foreseeable economic, or other potential impacts resulting from the proposed designation and any impacts on small entities; and
- whether the Service’s approach to designating critical habitat could be improved or modified in any way to provide for greater public participation and understanding, or to assist us in accommodating public concerns and comments.

Critical habitat is a term used in the Endangered Species Act. It identifies specific geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and which may require special management considerations. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other special conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands. However, federal agencies that undertake, fund, or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

In 30 years of implementing the Endangered Species Act, the Service has found the designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection for most listed species, while preventing the agency from using scarce conservation resources for activities with greater conservation benefits.

In almost all cases, recovery of listed species will come through voluntary cooperative partnerships, not regulatory measures such as critical habitat. Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the Act, including habitat conservation plans, safe harbor agreements, candidate conservation agreements and state programs. In addition, voluntary partnership programs such as the Service's private stewardship grants and the partners for fish and wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for listed species is provided on many of the Service's national wildlife refuges and state wildlife management areas.

The Service will consider comments from all interested parties received by October 16, 2006. Requests for a public hearing must be received, in writing by September 29. Comments and materials concerning the proposal may be sent via e-mail to fw1pie_pwfchp@fws.gov. Comments and information may also be mailed, faxed, or hand-delivered to Patrick Leonard, Field Supervisor, Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office, 300 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 3-122, Box 50088, Honolulu, Hawaii 96850 (Fax 808 792 9581).

The proposed rule was published in the *Federal Register* on August 15. Copies of the proposed rule may be downloaded from the Service's website at www.fws.gov/pacificislands or by calling the Fish and Wildlife Service's Honolulu office 808-792-9400.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices, and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American Tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the federal assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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